

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L MEXICO 3927

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, MX

SUBJ: PRESIDENTIAL SUCCESSION

1. FOLLOWING IS SUMMARY OF SECOND EMBASSY AIRGRAM CONCERNING PRESIDENTIAL SUCCESSION. THE FIRST (A-533, DEC 14, 1974) TOOK LOOK AT THE SYSTEM, CONCLUDING PRIMARY OBJECTIVE IN EACH SUCCESSION IS TO CHOOSE CANDIDATE WHO CAN MAINTAIN UNITY IN HETEROGENEOUS RULING COALITION, AND THAT RESPONSIBILITIES OF SECRETARY OF GOVERNMENT (MOYA PALENCIA) PUT THAT OFFICIAL IN BEST POSITION TO BUILD NECESSARY SUPPORT.

2. SECOND AIRGRAM ANALYZES POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT TO SEE WHETHER ANY FACTOR THREATENS TO MAKE THIS SUCCESSION PROCESS EXCEPTIONAL IN SOME WAY. WE CONCLUDE THAT POLITICAL CLIMATE IS RELATIVELY TRANQUIL, ESPECIALLY COMPARED WITH PERIODS IN WHICH PREVIOUS SUCCESSIONS TOOK PLACE. OF IMPORTANT POLITICAL AND INTEREST GROUPS, ONLY BUSINESS MAY HAVE DISPROPORTIONATE SAY BECAUSE MEXICO CANNOT AFFORD ANOTHER SIX YEARS OF INVESTOR TIMIDITY.

3. OPINION THAT PRESIDENT ECHEVERRIA WILL CHANGE SELECTION PROCESS PERSISTS IN CONTRADICTORY FORM -- HE HAS OPENED UP POLITICAL SYSTEM MAKING RACE FREE FOR ALL, OR HE WILL ACT TO KEEP POLITICAL POWER AFTER HIS TERM OF OFFICE ENDS. WE FIND BOTH ARGUMENTS UNCONVINCING, THE FIRST BECAUSE A MORE

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OPEN SYSTEM WOULD LESSEN POWER OF THE INCUMBENT PRESIDENT.

ECHEVERRIA HAS NOT REALLY MADE POLITICAL SYSTEM MORE DEMOCRATIC AND WE DOUBT HE WILL START WITH PRESIDENTIAL SELECTION PROCESS. WE ALSO DOUBT THAT PRESIDENT WILL TRY TO TAMPER WITH THE PROCESS FOR MACHIAVELLIAN PURPOSES: IT WOULD THREATEN UNITY OF RULING COALITION (PRI PLUS BUSINESS); AND ECHEVERRIA IS TOO WISE IN THE WAYS OF MEXICAN POLITICS TO BELIEVE HE COULD SUCCEED. MOST PLAUSIBLE VARIANT OF THIS REASONING IS THAT PRESIDENT MIGHT IGNORE SUPPORT FOR MOYA PALENCIA TO CHOOSE CANDIDATE (SUCH AS LABOR SECRETARY MUÑOZ LEDO) WHO WOULD CONTINUE ECHEVERRIA POLICIES WITH MOST GENUINE CONVICTION. COUNTER VIEW IS THAT SUPPORT FOR MOYA WOULD BE DIFFICULT TO IGNORE (OR, THAT OBJECTIVE OF UNITY HAS HIGHER PRIORITY THAN CONTINUATION OF REFORMIST COURSE). ALSO, PRESIDENT MAY WELL DECIDE MOYA, WITH CONFIDENCE OF THE RIGHT, IS CANDIDATE IN STRONGEST POSITION TO CONTINUE REFORMIST COURSE IN SOCIAL, ECONOMIC, AND FOREIGN POLICY. WE QUESTION FACILE ASSUMPTION THAT MOYA MIGHT REVERSE ECHEVERRIA POLICIES IN THESE AREAS.

4. LAST FIVE MONTHS HAVE WITNESSED SOME POLITICAL EPISODES WHICH WERE PUBLIC MANIFESTATIONS OF PRIVATE CAMPAIGNING BY MAJOR CANDIDATES. MOST HAD MOYA PALENCIA AS TARGET. OF THESE, ONLY HIDALGO GUBERNATORIAL SUCCESSION LAST OCTOBER APPEARED TO HURT MOYA. THIS EFFECT WAS DRAMATICALLY REVERSED RECENTLY WHEN GOVERNOR WHO ATTACKED MOYA WAS THROWN OUT ONLY 29 DAYS AFTER TAKING OFFICE. (MEXICO 3777). EXCELSIOR STORY REGARDING AN ALLEGED TAX ON PRIVATE WEALTH SUCCESSFULLY DREW ATTENTION TO WEAKNESS OF TREASURY SECRETARY LOPEZ PORTILLO (LACK OF COOL) AND HIS CANDIDACY HAS SUFFERED. SLANDEROUS WHISPERS ABOUT PRESIDENCY SECRETARY CERVANTES DEL RIO HAVE CIRCULATED, BUT PROBABLY WITHOUT ADVERSE EFFECT. CERVANTES CANDIDACY HINGES UPON HOW HIDALGO INCIDENT IS PERCEIVED BY POLITICIANS AND KEY INTEREST GROUPS, AS HE MAY HAVE BEEN ASSOCIATED WITH LOSING SIDE IN HIDALGO.

5. WE BELIEVE MOYA PALENCIA IS STILL IN STRONGEST POSITION TO GET NOMINATION, BUT HE DOES HAVE POSSIBLE LIABILITIES: WHETHER LABOR WOULD OPPOSE HIM IS NOT KNOWN (WE SUSPECT IT WOULD NOT); IF EFFORTS TO TAG HIM AS REACTIONARY SUCCEED, ECHEVERRIA COULD OPT FOR A MORE CENTRIST CANDIDATE. AT THIS POINT, HIS STRENGTHS APPEAR FAR TO OUTWEIGH POSSIBLE WEAKNESSES.

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6. ANNOUNCEMENT OF SUCCESSOR IS STILL FIVE MONTHS OFF AND INTEREST OF PRESIDENT ECHEVERRIA IS TO KEEP EVERYONE GUESSING, OTHERWISE HE BECOMES LAME DUCK PRESIDENT.

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